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Become United - 1865

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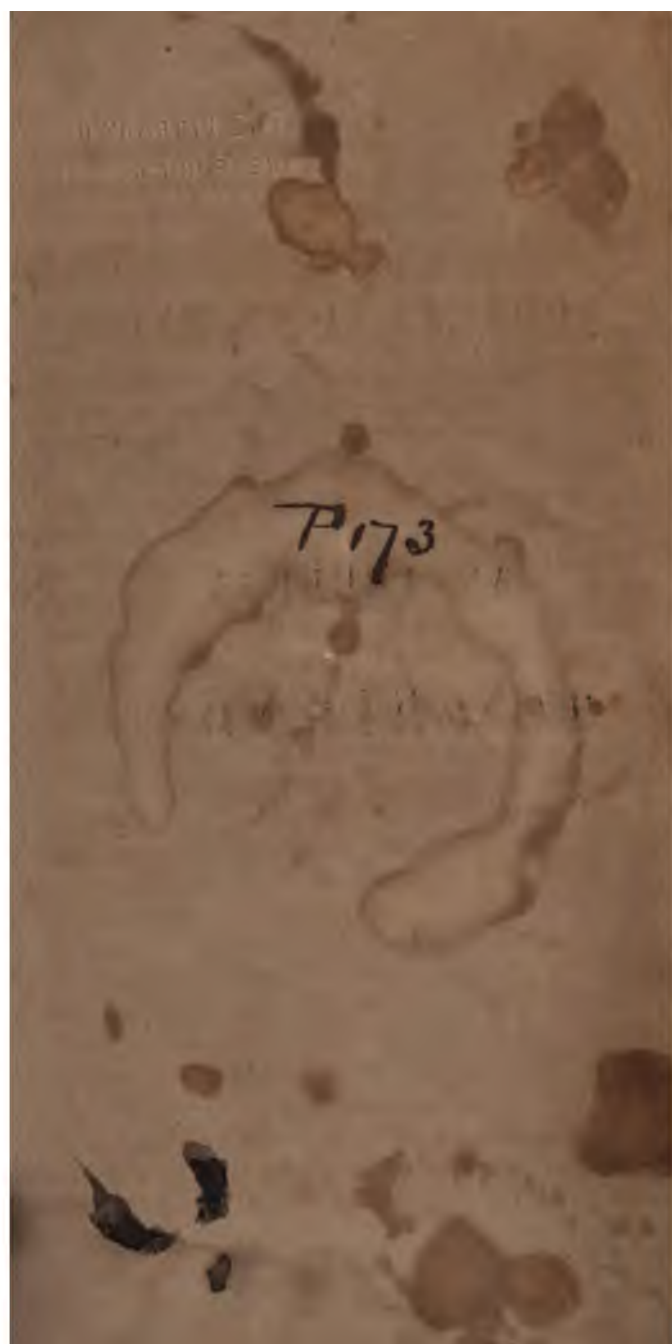


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## Can all professing to be Friends become United?

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I have been furnished with the printed Extracts from the Minutes of the Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in the Fifth month last, by an influential and highly valued member, with a request that I would assist in the good work of reconciliation among all those who hold to the name of "The Religious Society of Friends."

He has truly said that I am well acquainted with the causes of the separation; and though I am not a member of either division, I have always highly valued the testimonies of the Society, and consider their maintenance most important to the welfare of mankind. Their faith I have regarded as the truest exposition of Christianity, and of that evidence of Himself which the Creator gives through the understandings and hearts of his children.

Though I may have little claim to be heard with favor and influence upon this interesting subject, my sympathies cannot but be engaged with those who would restore to harmony and gather together all who are seeking to walk uprightly in the same Christian profession. For nearly forty years my professional and friendly advice has always been given, to all claiming the name of the Society, to avoid litigation, and to cultivate kindly feelings, believing that Friends held in keeping for themselves and mankind a faith and testimonies incomparably more valuable than all the property they owned. I have been ever grateful to find my counsels heeded, and that since the first temporary litigations Friends on each side have exhibited re-

markable forbearance, and afforded practical evidence of a faithful observance of their own pacific principles.

Though unable to speak in the authority of a constant upholder of the testimonies of the Society, I can speak with an interest and earnestness little less than that of deeply concerned members. My education was in the Society, my beloved parents holding very responsible stations therein, and in every branch of my ancestry I trace a lineage through worthy Friends back to the settlement of the Province by William Penn,—an ancestry whose memory I honor and love with a warm affection. My intercourse, through an active life, verging on three-score and ten, has been constantly with Friends, and I count it a source of preservation and happiness that I have enjoyed their friendship. If possibly I can do them any good, I owe it to them as an obligation; and I owe it to society at large to promote the influence of Friends for the good they can do to their fellow men.

As an outside observer, and as one not speaking from within the pale of the Society, it may, indeed, be that I will be listened to as one speaking more impartially than if a member. From another position than within the Society I have been enabled to observe and estimate its power for good, not only as regards its own members, but in respect to its influence upon general society, of which Friends are a part, possessing elements that have a constant power to leaven the mass. Friends owe duties deeply interesting and responsible not only to their own members, of their own generation, but to countless generations to come; duties of education, moral and religious; and they owe duties to mankind not less, perhaps even more important; and not only to the passing, but to indefinite future generations. Friends cannot be suffered to lose the belief that the day and generation of their usefulness has

passed away. Friends themselves have taught the world to expect services and benefits at their hands: in the example they afforded; in their moral influences in their neighborhoods; in the part they have taken in education; in the administration of charities; and in their vindication of the rights of conscience and the claims of humanity. They were the early advocates of temperance; the first to strike from the slave his fetters; and made good their own exemption from that wrong before they gave their potent services to carry further reforms by ceaseless labors for emancipation. For two centuries past,—that is to say, ever since the rise of the Society,—Friends have been the truest and best reformers that England ever knew. Through long, grievous, and often fatal sufferings and imprisonments, faithfully borne, they wrought there the toleration of their worship of Almighty God, according to the dictates of conscience, and thereby helped to educate that nation and the American colonies to that height of statesmanship, which finally placed the guaranties for the freedom of conscience and the liberty of worship in all the American Constitutions. Without the combined teachings and labors of American and English Friends, the destruction of the slave trade and the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies would not have taken place at the periods they did, if, indeed, at any time in the past; and if those measures of justice and humanity had not been accomplished as and when they were, who can believe that the world would have witnessed the glorious consummation that we are now beholding with our eyes upon this Continent?

The Friends of this or any coming generation can well look back upon their own history, with complacency and grateful hearts, as one of stern perseverance and endurance in the great cause of human right and freedom; but may

not live upon the reputation of the past, and cease to feel that they yet owe duties to a world still afflicted by many evils, and ever liable to relapse into injustice and oppression. They owe it as a duty to themselves and to mankind, and will ever continue to owe it as a duty, to preserve their good example for the world, and to work and to strive for the diminution of evil and to increase the sum of good among men. There is yet need, and will ever be needed, their example of moderation in a world immoderately hastening to become rich; of their correct morals and steady and regular industry in all business and trade; of their accustomed co-operation in all good deeds of charity and public usefulness; having first, as heretofore, unaided, provided for all their own poor, sick, and insane, and educated their children, whether rich or poor. They will always be a needed ballast to the communities in which they live; not, indeed, by admixture in strife and contention, but in quiet words fittingly spoken, and unobtrusive acts for the general good. Their mission is not ended. Their service cannot become obsolete.

Friends not only owe it to themselves, but to the world, to stand by and faithfully maintain their testimonies among themselves and in the world; testimonies against all human wrong and oppressions, against all wickedness and inhumanity. The religious faith they maintain, and for which many of their worthy ancestors suffered and died, they maintain not for themselves alone; for though they seek not busily to make proselytes, they have cherished a faith by which mankind has been silently influenced more than has been acknowledged, and they owe it to the world to keep the light of that faith brightly burning before men. It is not for me here to define, further than to say, that the uprising of the Society was a recurring by its founders

to Christianity in its purity and spiritual power, as transmitted by the Saviour, the Evangelists and Apostles.

What, then, is the argument now to be addressed to Friends to induce them weightily to consider what is their duty at this eventful period of their own, and of the history of the world? What shall they say to each other, and what shall their friends not in membership say unto them? The Society has had a great and good mission: it has well and faithfully performed it. But in a world full of evil the present can never supinely rest upon the past. They cannot enter upon the fruits of the labors of worthy predecessors and passively enjoy them. That is not the "condition of the battle" of this life. It is the duty of Friends to continue to achieve the greatest sum of good to mankind. Their divisions have impaired that power; and continue to impair that power for good. Divisions imply to other minds differences of opinion, antagonism of feeling,—imply defect and error somewhere of extensive prevalence. This impairs confidence and limits their influence for good. Friends suffer thereby, and society at large scarcely less. No subject affecting human rights and welfare but should receive the impress of the modifying power of Friends for good. So largely such subjects have received such impress, and the world's advancements in reform are the evident proofs. They made good their testimonies among themselves, and then with clean hands and earnest trust strove to reform the evils of the world. The like disposition and power yet remain in action, and are achieving a good the extent of which no one can estimate. But who can doubt that if Friends were a united people, working in entire harmony, and with all their former prestige, they would accomplish a more extended good, and give a greater assurance of the continuance of the power to do great good in the future. The mission of

Friends is indeed not ended; their power is not obsolete, nor to be suffered to become obsolete. They may not rest from their labors. Great evils have been mainly conquered; but the good done is an incentive to continue to strive and to conquer existing and ever recurring evils. So long as the seeds of good and evil are sown together in the world there will be work to do; boundless are the fields wherein the harvests are ever ripening, and wherein the faithful laborers are comparatively few.

Motives there are, then, for Friends and others than Friends, to speak encouragingly to Friends, to seek to make their influence, under Divine permission and authority, the most pervasive and permanent practicable. We are living under institutions and in an age whose tendencies are all towards toleration and a friendly and charitable intercourse between members of different religious persuasions. The same tendencies extend to permit shades of differences in opinion among members of the same religious denomination, which are not radical; other religious sects which have separated are again tending towards reunion; and those that have their differences exhibit a diminished centrifugal tendency. The Creator has made the minds of men as diversified as their features, and it is within the permission of his Providence that there may be differences of views among those who yet have claim to be His children. A Christian charity and a sound practical wisdom can recognise and allow these differences, with unabated love and unimpaired regard, where social intercourse and religious association can be had without a compromise with an unchristian faith or a moral delinquency.

Truly, there must not be that difference of doctrine among those who assemble together to worship the common Father, in the name of Christ, which would make that worship unacceptable, which would repel a commu-

nion of social and spiritual worship, or it might be even wounding to the feelings; for then the object of worship would be frustrated. It is this apprehension that is now the greatest obstacle to a reunion of those dissevered bodies who claim to be Friends. All, without doubt, sincerely maintain all the testimonies of the Society; those against oaths, the dealing in contraband or prize goods, or ardent spirits, the practice of war, holding slaves in bondage, supporting a compensated ministry, &c. Time has been doing its beneficent work in removing differences; the judgment has become more dispassionate; extremes have subsided; asperity of feeling has died out; and the grave has covered those who stood in strongest antagonism. False assertions have been lived down; and the real worth of those in the separated divisions has come to be more candidly viewed and estimated at a truer value. The majority of each division, I have always believed, were unconscious of any departure from their former faith, and have sincerely believed themselves to stand upon the same ground as ancient Friends; and it is no doubt true that where individuals have gone into an extreme, beyond the sustaining sentiment of their religious association, they have been the subjects of a constant but patient care and solicitude by their brethren and sisters in religious fellowship. This may be believed, and charitably considered.

The subject of reconciliation must as a practical one, be regarded in two aspects: First, kindly and charitable feelings must necessarily be mutually cultivated, and become sincerely entertained before a reunion could ensue, or be desirable. If religious worshippers have not that badge of discipleship given by the Master, love for each other, a communion of worship could not afford comfort or prove salutary. In cultivating such a disposition nothing but good can ensue; and so far the movement made must re-

sult in good, whether the hoped-for consummation be attainable or not. Leniency of judgment, charitableness of feeling, are in themselves Christian graces, and blessings are their award.

Secondly: To worship together acceptably and usefully, the worshippers must worship in the fellowship of the same faith; and this more especially must congregations of Friends, who meet to worship in spirit and in truth the Almighty Father, in the presence of the overshadowing power of Christ as Head of the Church. It is only as in his living presence they can truly worship God, who is a Spirit, and only by His authority can any rightfully speak in His holy name. The true worshippers in his name have his promise to be with them; they gather to worship in full faith that that promise will be fulfilled; and that there will be a communion of spirit in social worship. All holding to the name of Friends are in unison in this faith and worship. They all alike profess to hold to the authority of the Holy Scriptures; and all claim to stand upon the same foundation as the eminent Founders of the Society. If on either hand they do not so stand, in sincerity and truth, they cannot desire to meet to worship together under the profession made by ancient Friends.

It is, however, often said that the Founders of the Society held as individuals a diversity of views, and yet were united in a sincere and earnest religious fellowship. This may be admitted without admitting any diversity of views as to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. They did not, as other churches, form an outward written creed, as the articles of their faith and the terms of their religious association; but holding as a distinguishing and paramount doctrine, the immediate revelation of the Divine Spirit, they did on various occasions make declarations of their faith upon cardinal points, couched in the language

of the Holy Scriptures ; and taking these and their other writings and preachings and practices together, we must arrive at the conclusion that they were true and earnest in a sound Christian faith, as that faith is contained in the words of the New Testament, according to their plain and most truthful import ; to be taken literally where the narrative or teaching was intended to be so taken, and figuratively and spiritually where intended to be taken in such sense ; constantly relying on the Divine Spirit to aid their undertakings, not only in expounding the Scriptures, but also in opening the understandings of others to a comprehension of the Scriptures, and of their duties towards man and God. Their controversies with other Christian professors never involved a denial of any Scripture language or doctrine, but of the unwarrantable deductions made and set down in the creeds of other Churches. They held and preached the Christian faith in its fulness, according to the testimonies of our Saviour himself, as to his mission, death, ascension and offices, as set forth by the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles. Ancient Friends appear never to have held and promulgated a Christian faith less full and firm than that held by other Churches. They accepted it in its fullest import in Scripture language, but shorn of inferences which men had made, and which Friends deemed unauthorized, unwarrantable and dangerous. Friends mainly differed from others in those views that insisted upon the continuing visitations of the Holy Spirit and inspirations of the Almighty to all who heed and obey his voice ; and under that divine power and guidance, they insisted upon a higher and holier attainment in religion ; upon a more thorough self-investigation and abstinence from sinfulness ; and upon being more thorough and perfect practical Christians than most other Christian professors ; but still loving those who groped in

greater darkness, and ever lovingly owning as true professors and brethren in Christ all those who were truly devout and earnest and spiritually-minded, in whatsoever Church, or country, or age they lived and worshipped the common Father, in and by the spirit and power of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

What may be the result of the recent movement I am not gifted with the prescience to foresee. Yet I cannot but believe in some consummation of good. If but prejudices can be removed; if but kinder and more charitable feelings can be restored, it will be a good attained. I can but indicate, as I have, in general terms, the grounds of action and the required mutual attainment. The means towards the end, of whatsoever extent, must be chiefly by individual effort, before they can ripen to become action by meetings of discipline or worship. It is probable that it will be permitted to those who are now aged but to suggest, labor, and pray for the consummation of a re-union of those, or the successors of those, who formerly labored together for the prosperity of the Church and the advancement of human welfare; yet will these, in this effort, have done a good work and set a good example, in their day and generation, and may well derive therefrom comfort and consolation in their declining years, and in a yet remoter retrospect of their deeds done in time, experience an added joy to their happiness.

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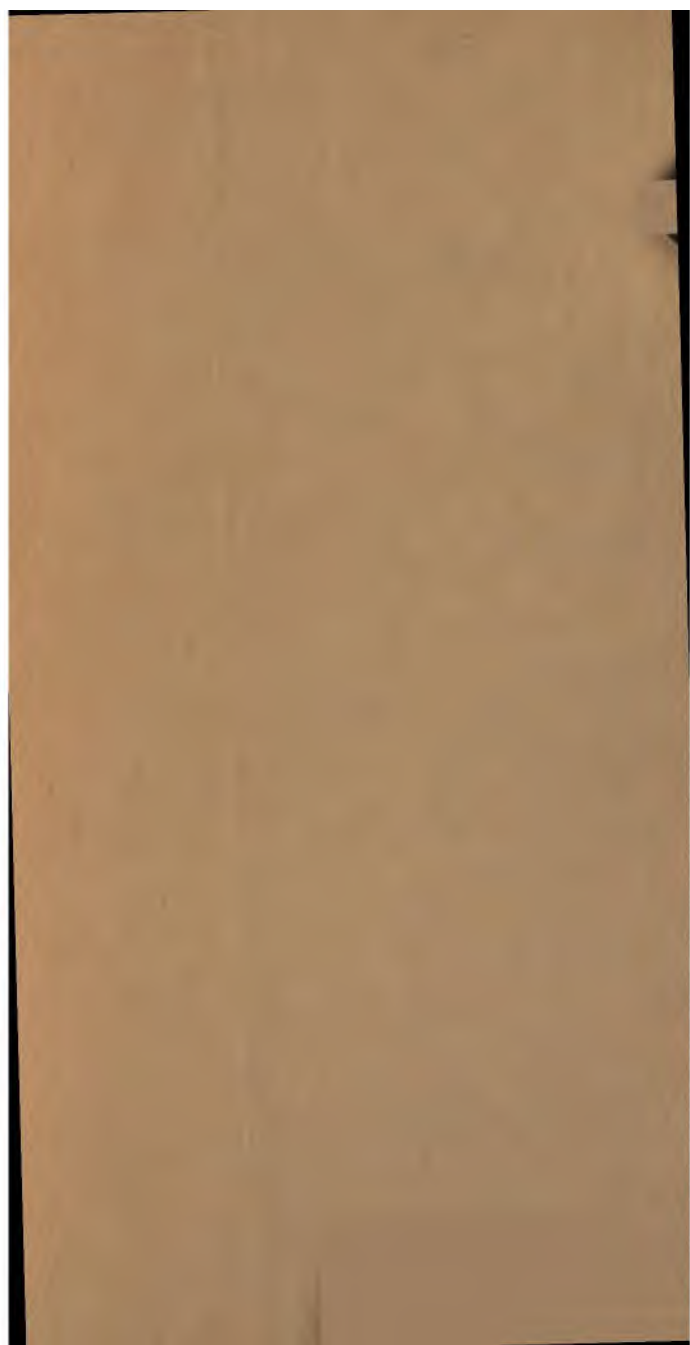
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